

Plea for the Sabbath in War.

CHRISTIAN PATRIOTS are solicitous that the existing war may be so conducted as to secure the *right* of our citizen soldiers to their wonted day of rest and worship, and so as to avoid all needless invasion of public morals. A jealous care for the permanent moral foundations of our free institutions should assuredly characterize the struggle for their perpetuation.

The movements of our armies are familiarly known. For some unexplained reason, they have too commonly trenched on the Christian Sabbath. The engagement at Great Bethel began on Sunday night, June 9. The great battle at Bull Run was fought on Sunday, July 21. The manœuvres of the army of the Upper Potomac were mostly on Sunday. Forts and Camps have been made the places of holiday Sunday resort over the land; and that seems to have been the favorite day of departure from the army depots for the theatre of war. Take the following *itinerary* from the army correspondence of the *Times*:

“I presume this regiment will come home next *Sunday*. I judge so from the fact that most of its movements have been on *Sunday*. It left New York on *Sunday*—went into Virginia on *Sunday*—came back on *Sunday*—moved to Hagerstown on *Sunday*—moved to Bunker Hill on *Sunday*—moved to Charlestown on *Sunday*—moved out of Harper’s Ferry on *Sunday*—and I presume next *Sunday* will be borrowed to end the campaign on *Sunday*. *Not in one single instance has there seemed to be any public danger or necessity to call for such a habitual and continuous disregard of the Sabbath day.*”

The correspondent of the *New York Tribune* thus comments on the same facts: “*The Sabbath has been signalized throughout the campaign as the day for making nearly all important movements of the army;*” and he contrasts the Sunday opening and closing of the campaign: “Then they (the soldiers) were impetuous and enthusiastic: now they are returning home after a fruitless campaign,” etc.

We need not multiply the evidences of a painful disregard of the Lord’s Day in the marshalling and manœuvring of our armies. It does not become us to comment on the military results of these movements. We would gladly believe that military necessities more

obvious than those that meet the public eye have constrained some of "the important movements of the army,"—in so far qualifying the testimony quoted above; and we would have it borne in mind that the statements before us mostly relate to but a single wing of our extended forces. But, at the best, it is a sad, ineffacable record. Military reverses may be retrieved and turned into victories; Christian patriotism, however, can only deprecate and weep over the inconsistency and the wrong of irreverent dealing with an institution hallowed by the most sacred associations, at the very outset of a conflict in which the best sympathies and energies of the Christian community are enlisted. We do but echo the voice of American Christianity when we urge, that there may be *a respectful observance of the Lord's Day in the future conduct of the armies of this Christian Republic.*

The mischievous maxim—*leges silent inter arma*: laws are silent in war—is worthy of its heathenish Latin origin: it deserves no place in the ethics of a Christian Republic; certainly none in a war "to restore the supremacy of the laws." War is enough of a scourge, even when the wonted restraints of human and divine laws continue to curb evil passions; but under free, self-governing institutions, with no guarantee but law for individual or public security, the assertion of the principle that war absolves from legal and moral obligations is equivalent to the claim that war, anarchy, barbarism, are synonymous terms. We know of no adequate authority for singling out the Christian Sabbath from the moral code, or from the civil statutes, as preëminently the victim of war. Is it because European armies have made it their battle-day? True, many of the great battles of the Continent have been fought on Sunday, by the standing armies of kings and emperors—often, as at Waterloo, ending in the defeat of the assailing army. But it is also true, that Sunday is the favorite day for military reviews, civic parades, and holiday sports, in peace as in war; and it is further notoriously true, that the nations thus habitually trifling with sacred time furnish no such example of moral or political advancement as to commend their no-Sunday views or acts to our emulation, either in peace or war. Until we are prepared to accept their despotic forms of government, and their vast standing armies, and their depraved condition of public morals—the necessary correlatives of their no-Sunday regime—we see not that it is safe or wise to plead their Sunday fighting as the precedent or justification of our needless Sunday war movements and battles. It is certain that our own military annals do not encourage aggressive warfare on the Lord's Day: for it was on that day that Montgomery was defeated and slain at Quebec; that the battle of Monmouth was waged at least fruitlessly; that

the engagement on Lake Champlain resulted in victory to the assailed American fleet; and that the British forces were routed in their attack on New Orleans. Great Bethel and Bull Run are of to-day.

But we claim no warrant from these or other data for interpreting specific providences as divine judgments on specific offences. Certain great principles of the divine economy are clearly revealed in the Word, and illustrated by the Providence of God. The whole scope of history is concurrent with the recorded design of Jehovah that His Name and His Day and His Son should be known and revered among men and nations. He reigns. He honors those who honor Him. His frowns rest on those who despise His will. "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people." Nations, communities, corporations experience an earthly retribution alone—individuals meeting their several deserts at the great day for unrepented complicity with associated wrong-doing. We would not presume to judge of the sweep of such principles in their application to specific wrongs, however promptly an apparent disaster may follow apparent impiety and folly. "God is his own interpreter." We dare not seek to penetrate His counsels, or inscribe His thunderbolts. We do not feel authorised to associate Sunday battles with Sunday defeats, and "all important movements of the army on Sunday" with a humiliating "fruitless campaign," as unquestionable judgments of Heaven: *nor is there any warrant for denying that they are.* But we have an undoubted warrant for the claim that the Lord's Day is in the keeping of a wise and holy Providence; and that men, armies, and nations trample on that day at their peril.

We may further premise that we cherish no views of the sanctity of the Sabbath that would restrain an army from all necessary arrangements for health or comfort, or for its own and the public safety. It may defend itself when assailed, and march troops to reinforce an imperilled position. All necessary and beneficent acts, dictated by a prudent regard for the national security and the well being of the army, may have the sanction of a commanding officer, without contravening the law of the Sabbath. Nor will the thousand details that enter into the administration of military affairs be difficult of adjustment, when subordinated to a wise and inflexible purpose to "Remember the Sabbath-day."

These things being premised, we base our plea for the due observance of the Sabbath in the further conduct of our armies, on the broad ground of the physical and moral needs of the army; a just respect for the rights and feelings of the Christian community, and,

more than all, a becoming regard for the Divine Law and for the favor and blessing of God.

Our soldiers need a Sabbath. The drill and discipline of the camp, the building of entrenchments, the marchings and countermarchings, the picket, scout, and guard duties of an army in the field, are no holiday pastimes. There is hard work and a plenty of it; and where there is work there must be rest—periodical rest. It remains to be proved that there is any other or better apportionment of time for alternate labor and rest in an army than that defined by infinite wisdom “for man.” And it has been proved, in military and civil life, that men will do more and better work in six days of labor and one of rest, than in the entire seven days of unintermitted toil. So that the actual efficiency of troops is not only consistent with the concession of their *right* to a weekly rest-day, but would be enhanced by it. Why, then, should not the whole army, under ordinary circumstances, have a whole day of rest every week?

But an American army is composed of something besides “muscle.” Our bayonets think. There are moral natures to be moulded or restrained by influences suited to them, or perverted and ruined by the atmosphere of the camp. It was the recorded experience of Washington: “The better the man the better the soldier.” The “Army Regulations” recognize this principle, and embrace many wise provisions for the moral benefit of the army, including those respecting chaplains, divine worship, reverent speech, sobriety, etc. But it has been well said by an incumbent of the U. S. Supreme Court, that “where there is no Christian Sabbath there is no Christian morality.” And until the officers of the army seek by example and regulation to bring their soldiers under the instructions and restraints appropriate to the sacred day, they have little right to expect a strict regard for discipline, and cannot hope for that principled courage which is ever invincible. Then, too, the peculiar structure of our armies presents a plea for Sabbath privileges. They are largely composed of the sons of moral and religious households. In a greater degree than ever before, the soldiers themselves are Christian men. Is it not due alike to them and their friends, that among the many temptations and trials of the camp, this heaven-appointed safeguard of their home habits and of their faith shall not be taken from them? Nay, is it not due to the tens of thousands of communities from which they have been garnered into the camp, that they shall not be sent back at last a Sabbath-breaking, demoralized band, to scatter broadcast the seeds of vice and iniquity over the land? What we need, and what the material of our forces largely provides for, is a brave, orderly, well-disciplined, law-abiding, God-fearing army—an army that neither breaks its lines nor breaks its Sabbaths.

It was such an army that the inspiring "general order" of WASHINGTON contemplated when he wrote, July 9, 1776 :

"The General hopes and trusts that *every officer and man will endeavor to live and act as becomes a Christian soldier*, defending the dearest rights and liberties of his country."

But the honor of our country and the rights of Christian citizens are concerned in this question. This is a Christian nation in its history, civilization, laws, and customs. Christianity, with its Sabbath, is recognized and protected as the prevailing religion, and as a part of the common law of the land. Sunday observance is so inwrought into the very texture of our political, social, and religious life as to form the distinctive national feature, in the view of foreign immigrants and tourists.

Should not this great fact have its influence on our army of American volunteers? Why should the military arm of government set at naught legislative and judicial guards of public morals; disregard the common law; and ignore the cherished rights of Christian citizens? The army is not an independent, irresponsible body. It may not forget the character, antecedents, and institutions of the country it defends. It embodies the power and upholds the honor and rights of a Christian people. But it is no more competent to pollute and destroy its Sabbaths than to burn its churches, or confiscate the property, or incarcerate the persons of good and loyal citizens.

The impolicy of this careless dealing with sacred time would seem to be obvious. Does it not directly tend to impair the confidence and support of a vast body of citizens, whose means and favor the army and the government have prodigally shared, and whose confidence and aid they can ill afford to lose? Does it not tend to strengthen rebellion, by its apparent justification of the plea of demagogues, that the "invasion" of the South is by "infidel hordes," bringing with it "the withering influence of the infidelity of New England and Germany combined?" Is it good generalship to weaken our friends and strengthen our enemies by a policy that has no sanction of law, conscience, or common sense?

But it is as wrong as it is impolitic. It is wholly inconsistent not only with our history, genius and habits as a people, but with the avowed objects of the war. Our armies enter the field to put down a gigantic rebellion, the offspring of ambition and the precursor of anarchy. They are ranged under a banner inscribed "The Union, the Constitution, and the enforcement of the Laws." Never had an army a higher, nobler mission. How shall it be executed? Is it right or expedient to begin and prosecute the work of restoring "the supremacy of the Laws" by trifling with the Deca-

logue? To suppress rebellion by rebellion against the Most High? To quench the flames that threaten our political edifice, by tearing away the dykes that prevent the waves of vice and godlessness from overwhelming society? To put into conflict or competition loyalty to the government and loyalty to the King of kings?

It is wrong, moreover, in doing violence to the conscientious Christian sentiment of the nation. Libertines may regard that sentiment as "straight-laced," "Puritanical," "superstitious," or what they will. But the government and all who fight under its banner must know that it *exists*, and that it has existed for generations, in no indiscriminate or unintelligent form, and in such strength as to have shaped our legislation and to have formed our national character and habits. It is more potent and enlightened now than ever before. It is patient under wrongs and charitable in its judgments. But it comprehends the sweeping moral pestilence of a vast Sabbath-breaking army, in open defiance of its cherished principles and its holiest convictions. True bravery will hesitate to array itself against true religion.

It is further wrong, because such repeated, public violations of the Sabbath expose the country to the visitations of the divine displeasure. It has been conceded that specific disasters following specific wrongs may not be necessarily interpreted as divine judgments. But that public and national sins bring national calamities is the teaching of revelation and of history. And we must blot out the record of the divine dealing with ancient Israel, and with it the history of all Christian nations; and we must shut our eyes to the existing condition of Christendom, before we can deny that the Sabbath is a "SIGN" between its Author and the nations, or that He blesses the nations that keep and frowns on those that trample on the Lord's Day. How or when His judgments may fall is among the "secret things" that belong unto God: that they will fall is as certain as that God reigns. The artillery of Providence is none the less terrible that its bolts come from invisible batteries. To brave omnipotence is madness.

Our final plea for restraining further violations of the Sabbath is based on the dependence of the nation and its armies on the divine favor and blessing. That dependence is absolute. No wisdom of rulers, no strength of armies, no energy or devotion of the people, will avail in the conflict before us, if our God, our father's God, be not with us. It is not true that "Providence *always* favors the heaviest battalions;" else we were still subjects of the British crown. It is true that "except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." For, "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of

old. . . . For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, *because thou hadst a favor unto them.*" We cannot recover and save the land without "the right hand" of the same Almighty Ally in whom our fathers trusted.

But on what ground may we base our hope of the divine favor, if we condemn the divine authority? "WE CAN HAVE LITTLE HOPE OF THE BLESSING OF HEAVEN ON OUR ARMS, IF WE INSULT IT BY OUR IMPIETY AND FOLLY," are the very words of WASHINGTON, in a general order to the Revolutionary Army relative to the Sabbath and to profane swearing. They are words of wise admonition to the officers and men of the Army of Restoration. Heaven is insulted by no "impiety and folly" more daring than the needless, wanton desecration of the Lord's Day; and "the blessing of Heaven on our arms" can be alienated in no surer or speedier way than this. Now, as in olden time, promises and threatenings alike guard the sacred day. "If ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath day, . . . then I will kindle a fire in the gates, and it shall not be quenched." "If thou turn away thy foot from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, . . . I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Our plea is ended. We submit it, with profound respect, to the Chief Magistrate of the United States, whose affecting appeal to the Christian heart of the nation for prayer and sympathy in the great crisis of his own and the nation's life still rings in the ears of millions. Is it too much to ask, in return, that the armies of which he is the commander-in-chief, may not be suffered needlessly to trample on the very heart-strings that yet vibrate to his voice?

We submit it to the venerable Lieutenant-General, whose brilliant military career has been unstained by inhumanity or irreverence, and whose regard for the Sabbath and for sacred things would add the weight of example to such a general order as the emergency demands—such an one as Washington issued*—restraining the profanation of the Lord's Day and name, during the existing war.

* "That the troops may have an opportunity of attending public worship, as well as to take some rest after the great fatigue they have gone through, the General, in future, excuses them from fatigue duty on Sundays, except at the ship-yards, or on special occasions, until further orders. The general is sorry to be informed, that the foolish and wicked practice of profane cursing and swearing, a vice hitherto little known in an American army, is growing into fashion. He hopes the officers will, by example as well as influence, endeavor to check it, and that both they and the men will reflect that we can have little hope of the blessing of Heaven on our arms, if we insult it by our impiety and folly. Added to this, it is a vice so mean and low, without any temptation, that every man of sense and character detests and despises it."—[*Sparks' Writings of Washington*, Vol. iv., p. 28.]

We submit it to the young and gallant General, whose career begins just when Sabbath desecration and consequent license has culminated in disaster; and whose character and history warrant the hope, that there will be no more Sunday battles, unless inaugurated by armed rebels, and no more needless war on the Sabbath.*

We submit it to the several Commanders of Divisions, Brigades, and Regiments, by whose orders the movements of troops are directed, and on whom the responsibility of any organized invasion of holy time must rest; respectfully entreating them, and each of them, to consider well whether the first element of efficient *command* is not a capacity and disposition to *obey*?

We submit it to the Armies of the Republic, as an humble plea for their *right* to a weekly season of rest and worship; and we appeal to each soldier so to discharge the duties bound up with the right that both may be a blessing and an honor.

We submit it to the Christian Patriots of the country, as embodying what we believe to be just and tenable views on a grave practical question of our times. While we would not be outdone in patriotic devotion to our beneficent government and our glorious civil institutions, we cannot sacrifice our Sabbath and our Gospel. With these no nation can be long enslaved: without these no nation was ever free. The grave that entombs our Sabbaths will cover our liberal Institutions. Shall we not seek to avert the doom of godless nations, and give earnest and timely heed to the voice of Infinite Wisdom? "I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and *hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God.*"

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* P. S.—SECOND EDITION.—The following general order "was read throughout the entire line, September 8, and was everywhere received with gladness."

General Orders, No. 7. HEADQUARTERS, ARMY OF THE POTOMAC, *Washington, Sept. 6, 1861.*

The major-general commanding desires and requests that in future there may be more perfect respect for the Sabbath on the part of his command. We are fighting in a holy cause, and should endeavor to deserve the benign favor of the Creator. Unless in the case of an attack by the enemy, or some other extreme military necessity, it is commended to commanding officers, that all work shall be suspended on the Sabbath; that no unnecessary movements shall be made on that day; that the men shall, so far as possible, be permitted to rest from their labors; that they shall attend divine service after the customary Sunday morning inspection, and that officers and men shall alike use their influence to insure the utmost decorum and quiet on that day. The general commanding regards this as no idle form; one day's rest in seven is necessary to men and animals; more than this, the observance of the holy day of the God of Mercy and of Battles is our sacred duty.

Official: A. V. COLBURN, Assistant Adju. Gen. GEO. B. McCLELLAN, Major-Gen. Commanding.